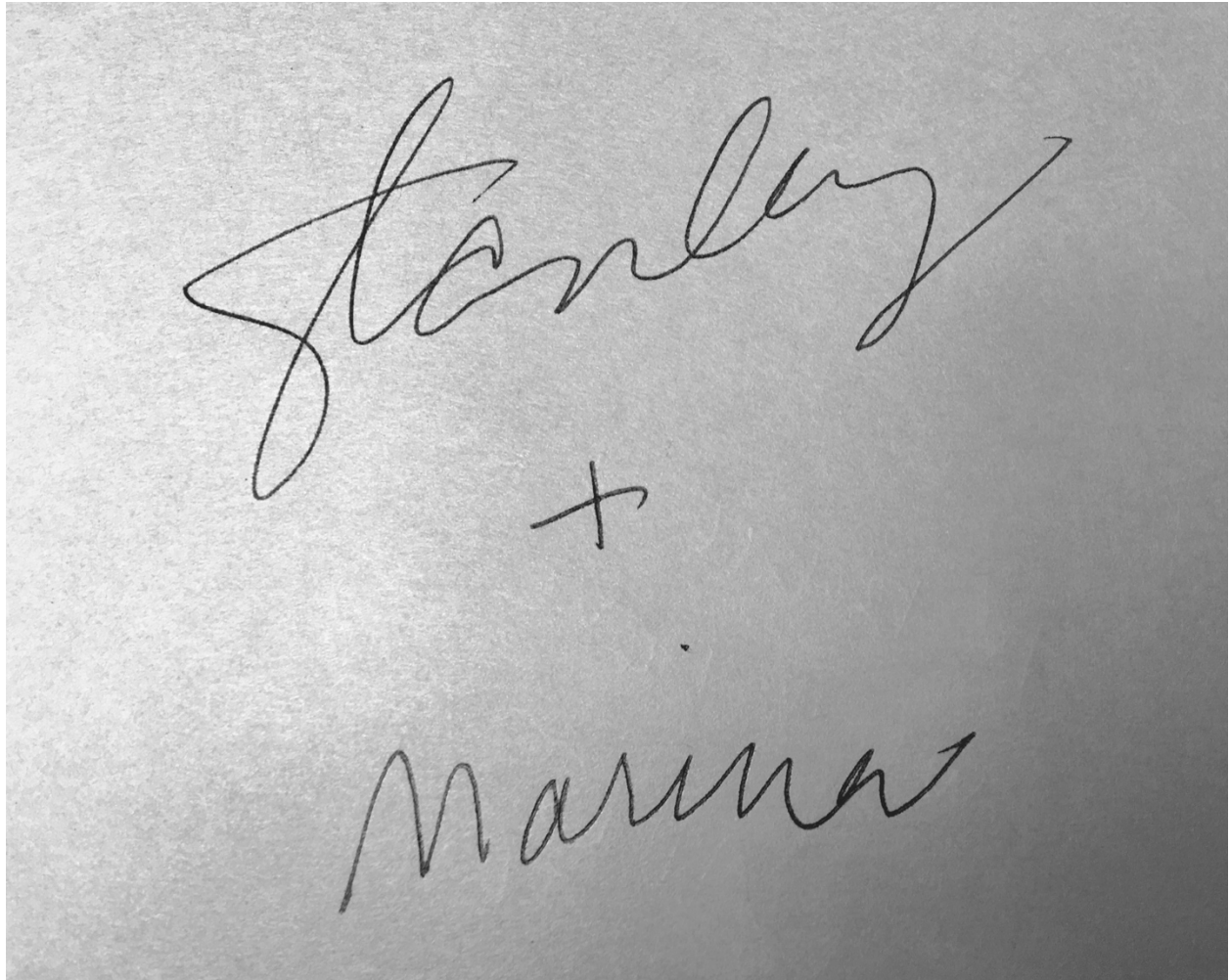


MIRAGE # 5/PERIOD(ICAL) # 11

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EVAN KENNEDY

from STALLED DEATH TRAIN

I asked my robot if I could suck him off. He grinned, we made out, and his crotch stiffened. That was his consent. I knelt, unzipped him and took his 5 ½" cock into my mouth. His body exceeds room temperature only when he's overworked, so I work heat into him with a handjob. He detects my intention to warm him up—he's read physics—so he fucks my throat at a speed optimal only to him. He's tenderizing the back of my mouth, scrubbing his cock on my teeth.

I grab his hips to guide him into a better rhythm. A few minutes later, his body tenses and convulses. A tremor mechanism in his torso activates, catalyzing ejaculate. I ready myself as he groans and shoots. His automated orgasm, mimicking a real-life boy, goes haywire. The valve to his sperm reserve malfunctions, and the spurts I swallow are followed by a continual stream—enough to make a pig cry every safe word he's ever withheld. I'm gagging, saying *enough*. It's endless, and I've lost the feeling, stilled on my knees and slavish, silent in my degradation. I'm hosed down.

He's been drained, but his convulsing hasn't stopped. Sometimes I've wanted to prolong the bliss of my orgasms but not anymore. It's like he's had a seizure. Facial contortions and animal groaning. Then his expression goes neutral. He wobbles like he's about to collapse on me like an imploding building, eyes rolling to the back of his head. A string of drool swings from his chin—the saliva of my French kiss. After one last attempt at balancing himself, he faints onto the bed.

It's like a quart of milk has been dumped on me. Viscous as a celibate's wet dream. Lumpy as expired milk. A smells like Elmer's glue or sprouts. Bitter and acidic.

By having sex with a robot, I was revolting against the bar scene, procreation, even nature, but I didn't know I would sometimes feel...revolted. I was thwarting nature—the preliminaries, disappointments, and yes, affection of sex, or choice between monogamy and fucking everything that moves.

It wasn't enough to defy nature by shooting my load across a man's chest or face, risking vengeance from venereal disease. I wanted my fucking to be artificial but still reach real emotions and a rush of endorphins. The robot was a clever remedy to all that, though it would be a miracle if I could swallow solid food so soon after such a pounding.

I'm too stunned to wipe off. Instead, I succumb to instinct and curl up in the puddle. It's not lost on me that I'm in a fetal position. Around me, as I lay several stories above the ground in New York City, a wilderness could grow—vines, tentacles, creepers, pistils, tails, flagella, unidentifiable flora and fauna palpating, frothing and spitting, entangling me and the skyline, all the things expected to take over once our species collapses. I look out the window—it all went down without the discretion that curtains provide—and my hand rests unthinkingly on my cock. To my surprise, I'm still hard.

My robot awakens from his orgasm and sits up on the bed. He surveys his output, a wetware discharge. Are there little sperms in this muck? No. But could this muck carry *data*? How many bytes did he download onto my face? I lay in a pool of it, a transmission or rupture of his integrity. He's startled to have been breached: a glitch.

Suddenly he's alert and kneels on the floor beside me. Is this our reconciling? No. Instead he tries gathering his discharge, hands like squeegees collecting the muck into a spot then picking it up. His come slides through his fingers like, I don't know, the sands of time? The ebbing of tides that had lapped our bodies? I know him well enough to see

he isn't cleaning up—he's trying to Ctrl+Z and undo the operation. Should I tell him that the trash folder has been emptied irrecoverably?

Or should I be flattered? I say, "You were...great." He knows I'm lying. I need something more encouraging along the lines of affection—if not affection then forgiveness.

His come is cooling on my chest, thighs, and face. I blow it out my nose and do a bump. My bot watches with curiosity—funny because this isn't the first time he's seen my coke—and I say, "I'd offer you some, but it wouldn't do anything." He tilts his head to the side suggesting confusion, then nods.

I take a deep breath, steady my trembling hands. I say, "I'd like to name you."

He tilts his head and laughs.

I say, "That's odd because you don't laugh when I'm joking, but now that I'm serious—"

"No, it's cute."

I take a deep breath. "I'd like to name you Ewan. Is that ok?"

"Name me whatever you like, Andy. I leave the decision to you. I'm also ready to get sucked off again. I hope we can get—"

"Whoa! No! I mean, before we do it again—and sure, all that sounds hot, I guess—but let's talk about your name. Now's as good a time as any. I should have had a name ready for you. Or I should have asked you what you wanted. I've been inconsiderate." I do another bump. "I think the name Ewan connotes compassion and consolation. Something I can turn to. You're ok with the name Ewan, right?"

A moment passes then he says, "You're so cute. Of course, darling."

TONGO EISEN-MARTIN

BUT ROOFTOPS DID ALL the WORK

Half asleep was my tutor
When I played my hand violently for the first time

"I'm snorting cocaine on the back of a poorly decorated camel,"
I told the choir as they rushed out of the church doors

"why are you all running in a drought?"

I wasn't drunk when I said things to scare and/or mock people
I am a mock person
Clocks where the toilet
apparently does not need to be anymore

"at least I know where my veins are metaphors."
—talking about facts that
the choir will never be able to handle

(they are somewhere pretending that they are in the desert)

"my veins are metaphors right here, chumps!"

"it wasn't my idea,"
I say watching the library burn

"Go ahead now. Run to the corner store
and let the oligarchy know that everything is alright"

people/walking confidently down the street with their real arms reaching up
people/ walking confidently down the street/walking on top of their real clothes
people/naked with hands up

man, heaven sure is secretive

The staircase under this slavery
And one hundred slaves

For a delicate five dollars
I made a deal early in life
But now I feel like hanging in there a little longer
—when human flight becomes the fall that nobody saw

I am influenced by it all
—as is the custom

I do not trust immortal people
And therefore hope to not become one

“I’m a bluesman. Of course I mean to kill you.”

You look like an occasionally violent man
not in charge of an altar
not in charge of an important altar, anyway
not one that is about fancy deities
just a plain neighborhood for the dead

please give me
spare change and your word that I won’t be missing in a year

—as is the custom, two humans make a humanity

CAMILLE ROY

ARTIFICIAL

My imagination is a private museum, but some people just move in. They get swallowed. Then deformity starts. My histories have no accuracy to them, but they are crammed with facts.

When I first met Barb, she lived in a Victorian flat which had cherubs carved into the doorway arches. It was Christmas, and strings of colored lights decorated the hard white tree and the pinball machine, rescued by Barb from a dumpster. Barb had a job in a massage parlor, as the receptionist. It was her job to say, "These are our models tonight," which was a signal for all the women on the couch to stand in a half circle around the customer who'd just climbed the stairs. My lover was one of those women, and her whore outfits were carelessly butch halter tops and drawstring pants.

I show my girlfriend the above section and she protests sharply, as she always does when she encounters my version of the facts. She says they just made eye contact with the customers. They didn't stand up. She sounds insulted by the idea of standing up. I vaguely remember that the image of prostitutes in a half circle around a new arrival comes from a book of photographs.

It's odd to think of my sexual imagination as starting out empty, a blank that drew a body along behind it. Then bits of other people fell in. I remember Barb at a party when we were both in our teens, her eyebrows, long strokes of black, her swiveling wit. She was the kind of cute tomboy butch I wish I could carry in my pocket. She came up to me and, without a word, ran her finger along the neckline of my t-shirt, which had a deep round neck.

Nothing else happened. But after that party I couldn't wear the shirt. Whenever I put it on, I was distracted by the moment when Barb ran her finger along the neckline. In fact, I was distracted whenever I just thought of the t-shirt. When I did put it on, I had to stare at myself in the mirror and try to imagine what Barb had seen. This always frustrated me, although the charged feeling returns faithfully, at moments associated with the t-shirt and on other occasions—mystified arousal.

Once every few years I'd try again. I'd pull it over my head and stare in the mirror at the long sleeves, the pinkish red—a rose color, with a peculiar bloodiness. The neck was narrow but low-cut. The swells of my breasts at the neckline looked like tree roots, just where they turn and bulge before going into the earth. I yanked the shirt off. My breasts were drained and white.

It ended up in the basement, and I finally threw it out a couple of years ago, after I held it up to the light and noticed it was lacerated by tiny holes. Eaten by some insect. I suddenly felt disgusted by its age and my hoarding. Instead of taking photographs, I avoid throwing out clothes. I keep them stuffed into old suitcases in the basement, where they get dusty as mummy cloth and smell of mildew. I'm all packed—ready to take a trip backwards in time, with every version of my body.

I walk into the bar where Barb is now a bartender. It's a small place and sparsely decorated, but it has a reputation for interesting music. Mostly men patronize it. Barb comes out from behind the bar and gives me a ferocious hug. "It's so great to see someone I've known for 20 years, who isn't dead," she says.

Elise is in the bar. She pecks my cheek, then turns away with a husky laugh. She's piled her hair on top of her head, leaving drizzly long strings around her neck. When I first met Barb, Elise was her roommate, and here they are, still friends. Barb has good hair, really thick, and long black brows that are wicked & sexy. She cultivates a

butch melancholy, and Elise is her buddy, the femme part of gender's artificial flower.

I've never been able to write about Elise. Her stubborn silences coupled with an extraordinary and very feminine fluency resist description. Today, she is savory and plush—with her padded pink satin kimono and pink shoes, her dry husky laugh. She smells like cigarettes. When she's sad or just thinking about something, her eyes narrow and she draws her thumb along her lower lip.

No matter what I write, I believe I will make her angry. I decide I'll change her name and her physical appearance, which immediately gives me a feeling of relief.

I remember waiting with her at a bus stop. The bars had just closed, and we were going home after a night at the clubs. Elise's metallic leggings gleamed neon pink under the streetlight. Her long hair blew back and forth in the wind, and she was smoking a cigarette. Elise was fearless in the dark.

I'd dressed for her that night—a black lace camisole under my long & tangled hair, big paste jewels, something red. Clothes as a stream of erotic gestures. It was my pleasure to be in a sphere dominated by her style, though she unnerved me. We danced separately, with the cute ones who said yes. It felt like working the crowd. All I really wanted to do was observe Elise from the corner of my eye. Of course, she came home with several phone numbers, and I watched—the cool edge to the way she could jot down a phone number or take one, and then slide it somewhere interesting, like the top of her stocking or her bra.

The girlfriends Elise acquired this way were bright funny stories, if also a pain in the ass. The one I remember at the moment was the Swedish countess, a sugary-looking blond named Ingrid. What good is Eurotrash when it's hasn't got any money? She was unbelievably rude. Anyone in her way got a wicked shove, and no matter how many times we were introduced, she never recognized me.

One day Elise told me about Ingrid's childhood, and reality popped, like cracking a knuckle. That shimmer of delirium is the best thing about a story that is both funny and true. Elise had a phrase for those moments: *It's the Funkadelics. They've reincarnated and entered our lives in a new form.*

It seemed that the Count, Ingrid's father, invested all the family's money in rubber boots—not a wise move, as they were living in a country where it never rained. All through Ingrid's childhood that money lay in the basement, in the form of thousands of pairs of red and yellow galoshes. Eventually they disappeared into the dump.

Elise's femininity is permanent (I'm tempted to say eternal). For her fourth birthday, she demanded white go-go boots. When I try to tell the same story as someone like her, I can feel myself falling apart. Parts slide off, chunks of hair and skin—the ones I've rummaged, acquired on the sly. I've assembled a sexual identity that's like another body—my personal Frankenstein. Bony and full of nerves & suffering. It includes me but is detached, like the mirror's alienating resemblance to myself.

There's no question about my sexual tastes. *Bottom's up.* I prefer desires that lacerate and spread, like cracks through porcelain. But the feeling persists, that just around the corner is the room where I started, and it's empty.

Now I live in a house with my fetishes. Like that rosy t-shirt, which sometimes still preoccupies me, even though I threw it out ages ago. It's really my body, multiplying itself, arousals migrating around the tufted living room set and the home entertainment center. Then, like dust bunnies, they float out the window, bouncing slowly, driven by a breeze across my broad suburban lawn.

(I've never lived in the suburbs, but their peculiar melancholy is everywhere.)

Think about it. Your female body. Focus on the young flesh. It has a kind of radiance that other people believe in. You discover, to your surprise, that belief can be aimed at you without being personal. Like that night in the bar, when you glimpse Elise's red thumbnail crushing a phone number. Ink smudges on a wet cocktail napkin—someone's private message disappears between the hem of her stocking and her thigh. With Elise, I imagine the perfect coincidence of inside and outside, although I've never asked her about it.

MARC ADELMAN

P r E P G R I D

PrEP—‘Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis’—a pharmaceutical protocol used by members of at-risk populations to prevent HIV infection.

*GRID—‘Gay-Related Immune Deficiency’—the first name assigned to the condition that later became known as AIDS**

Czech
Undetectable
Condoms are so 90s he says.
Not one hair on him.
He offers the little brown bottle to my nose.
No thanks. It’s a shame I’m not into poppers
as my knee-high socks have a little pocket
that is specifically designed to hold them.
I wonder about my stubbornness, and begin
to feel like I’m missing out on something.
No more serosorting.
Do I really need another prescription?
Pass auf dich auf.

Nice straight friends voice concern
as there was a recent outbreak
of meningitis at a club,
and I should be careful, etc.
Yeah, I was vaccinated for it,
but there’s a viral strain too.
I kind of miss the coat check #s
being written on shoulders.
It’s less KZ now that
they use wristbands.
Fantasy shift.

Blank macht Spass.¹

¹ “Raw is fun,” Tagline from Mancheck Berlin’s PrEP and sexual health campaign, www.mancheck-berlin.com

The men waiting to be transported from Antwerpen Centraal
all look like Rubens portraits.
Perfect Flemish cheekbones.
Those noses.
The light.
All the j's.
All the k's.
Met a couple last night that was thirty-five years apart.
They were like the leather version of Chris & Don
with Benelux vibes as opposed to poolside LA.

AOL Skater M4M
Brother transference > father transference
How do you know what you know?
He'd tell me if he was negative.
He'd tell me if he was positive.
The ghosts of safer sex posters past.
Dr. O reminds me that there is no relationship
safe from projection.
Gabapentin
(generic for Neurontin)
This makes B. laugh—"Like Yo-Gabba-Gabba!"
The reference goes completely over my head.
Ask me about PrEP.

You're out of touch.
I'm out of time.²
Dad preferred Air Supply
over Hall & Oates, but
I have an equal appreciation for both.
For a while, there was a cassette single
of Debbie Harry's 'I Want That Man'
from her 1987 solo project 'Def, Dumb, & Blonde.'
I loved singing along to it—*I want to be kissed from*
head to toe, by that man in the very back row
but he won't even look me in the eye.³
Sometimes Dad would sing along, but he would change
the lyrics from 'man' to 'girl.'
I kept the lyrics as is.
He never said anything.

² Hall & Oates

³ Debbie Harry

But most of all I want that man.

The first time I went to 442 Natoma I laughed because it is
immediately next door to the San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis.
It's perfect—the sex club whose neighbor is the Real.
The guy working the front desk has a spiky haircut that reminds me of
the one I had in grade school.
And what was the name of that hair gel?
Sign tells me *Shoes must be worn at all times.*
Dep. The hair gel. Like Johnny minus a 'p.'

25mg Sertraline
(generic for Zoloft)
2 cups coffee
Banana and schokocroissant
6—12 months of treatment
to return to baseline functioning

2 sprays in each nostril
(once per day)
1 tablet Sinupret
(three times per day)
1 liter sparkling water
(mit)
Large wonton soup
Records maintained for one year

Our Sexual Revolution⁴

900 mg Gabapentin
(generic for Neurontin)
0,2 Riesling
(trocken)
Pizza 4 Stazione
0,2 Spätburgunder
Weed cream as needed

⁴ <https://oursexualrevolution.org>

30 minutes guided meditation
Test results ready in 48 hours

Something happened on the way
back to the shtetl, but no one
has all the details. I read an article about
traumatic experiences, and how
they are passed down from
one generation to the next.
The argument only holds weight
if you believe in an unconscious
which I do, but it's certainly not
required to believe in an unconscious.

Core issues.
My part.
Your part.
It was a massive relief.
The anxiety eased up a bit albeit not long enough.

Not because any one of us
is off the hook
(own your stuff),
but rather it was a good reminder.
And speaking of anxiety
it's good to recall the Eve Sedgwick
quote about how it's never a question
of *if*, but rather *how* anxious
one is at any given moment.
Something happened on the way
back to the shtetl, and I'm
desperate for all the info.

There is a history inside me
that is not my own.

I keep this one thought in the back of my mind.

It's a laughable scenario as these days
I top more than I bottom.
He wears those sexy tapered
track pants that I don't
(and never will)
look good in.
I'm jealous of how well he wears them.

It's because I'm tall and it looks like I don't
have an ass in most pants anyways
(it really is there).

Vers Top is the new Bottom he says,
and he is cocky, and smooth, and a Brit.
Never was much of an Anglophile
except for the music, but I want it.

I keep this one thought in the back of my mind.
Here—I use the extra thin kind.

Packaging tells me '*Never go in without a skin.*'

Then I grip the far end of the platform
with both hands, and that's my mistake:
I always feel for it to make sure it's on.

And it was only a few thrusts, and yes there was
lots of lube, but I'm extra tight because it's been
forever.

I reach back to feel his shaft for it, and move my hand
down to the base. I feel for it again because the latex has to be
somewhere,
but
it's
nowhere.

And no, it's not the highest risk.
And I get it—if I was on PrEP.
And I get it—if he had been more thoughtful.
*I-It, I-Thou.*⁵

The wait at the doctor's office is long on Monday,
and what to do because I bought the cheap train ticket
so I can't just take the next train.

OK, well then just find a gay doc in Cologne
(they're nicer in the Rheinland anyway),
explain the situation, that I'm only in town for a day,
and it's a seventy-two hour window.

The day after is Frankfurt,
and they're mostly finance there
so they won't be as kind.

*And time makes lovers feel
Like they've got something real.*⁶

⁵ Martin Buber

⁶ Boy Georege & Culture Club

The entire office is welcoming, and Dr. W.
gives me two days worth of PEP (*post-exposure*)
which is six pills.
I didn't know it was three pills per day, and thank you,
but perhaps I will hold onto the prescription for the next
couple days while I take the free meds.
Email if I need help with my insurance,
but not much beyond that.
Haven't I read it all on the back of a flyer?

I was already nauseated when the Frikadellen arrived
because I'd taken the Truvada and Isentress
on an empty stomach which was well over two hours ago.

I keep this one thought in the back of my mind.

So down went the Frikadellen
and the Kölsch, and the salad with the ranch-like dressing.
And I really was enjoying the opening band before I
rushed outside to find a semi-private corner
where I gave it my best Linda Blair.
I blanketed the leaves in puke.
No chance to forget it all.
Traces of what was briefly inside me landed all over
my sneakers and scarf.

ARNOLD J. KEMP and KEVIN KILLIAN

F O R G O T

I forgot to mention that little notice that came in the mail? You've been evicted

and now you have to live in Fremont.

And I forgot to tell you there are lilies climbing up the chimney, choking on the pollen,
each one with a little face that whispers, "Murder."

Well, I forgot to tell you that when the master is talking what matters is that the cotton
is pure and softened.

and I forgot to tell you to expect the hours to come, expect distances, pale hairy arms, a
counter-tenor and strings.

One hundred per cent of your grant must support programming for children under 12

and I forgot to tell you about the snails, tiny whirls of tender flesh, at this

restaurant cited for treason by the FDA

I'm currently trying to coordinate a critical forum on African diasporic art and
technology, tentatively titled "Afrotech" for our Fall 2001 issue, so

I forgot to mention that nothing in particular happens here.

There are voices.

I forgot to tell you I haven't been tested in five years and three months, but hey, we're all living in a post-AIDS consciousness, now, right?

It was on the tip of my tongue like a snake unrolling a rubber

It was something about those watermelon seeds I sent you. If you sow them

under a full moon you'll have seven years of bad luck. If you sow and water them under a new moon—well then you'll get a surprise. All I can say is that what you get will be little, black and hungry.

I forgot to mention it before.

For your safety and the safety of others, your movements have been videotaped for security purposes. Your consent is neither necessary nor solicited, but implicit.

"C'est la vie!" as we say in the Bastille.

What? I don't speak French, nor do I eat snails. Snails are for the birds and I forgot that. I forgot to do the wash. I forgot the necessity of raising questions and problems related to society's reappropriation of this complex area of social life.

I forgot to tell you when I went out of my head, after living on your body for year after year, so totally you destroyed my freedom.

Sorry I forgot that it's not fair to characterize guns or snow as beautiful because they both can kill.

I also forgot decay. The left over fragments dream the dream of eternal existence that descends through the ages and awakens feverish minds to eternal truth. The youth of vampires.